

OPENING STATEMENT

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Member, U.S. House Committee on Science

Hearing: “H.R. 5143, the H-Prize Act of 2006”
April 27, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman; I am pleased to be here today for this hearing on H.R. 5143, *The H-Prize Act of 2006*. I would like to welcome the witnesses and I look forward to hearing their testimony. I apologize that other commitments will unfortunately prohibit me from staying for the full hearing today because the topic is an important one.

Energy is on the minds of many Americans right now and they are very upset about the current situation. Gas prices have risen to record highs and oil companies are reporting record profits. High natural gas prices concerned many of my constituents in Chicago this winter and forced some families to make hard choices to keep their heat on during the coldest months. We can be thankful that it was a relatively mild winter, but that may be a bad sign relate to global climate change. We are also becoming increasingly aware of the threats posed to our national security by our continued reliance on foreign fossil fuels.

There are many proposals in Congress to help relieve the pressure of energy prices. These range from short term solutions, such as ending tax subsidies for oil companies or easing various regulations, to long term approaches like research in hydrogen fuel, biofuels, and other renewables. No one idea or program is going to solve all of our energy problems, but if we do not start to assemble the tools and build an energy model for the future, we will be no better off 20 years from now than we are today, and likely we will be much worse off.

An economy based on energy outside of fossil fuels is no longer implausible. But to get there, we must invest in research and development now to be able to sustain our economy. Research grants are the basis of this process, but we in Congress have a responsibility to find creative and new ways to inspire researchers, business leaders, and our youth to solve the problems that society faces.

Once such example of innovative thinking is a bill introduced by Ranking Member Bart Gordon that replicates the successful DARPA program model and puts it to work in the Department of Energy. H.R. 4435, which I am proud to support, would establish a new ARPA-E function at DOE to speed the commercialization of innovative energy ideas and help reduce our dependence on foreign fuel.

Today's legislation at hand, H.R. 5143, seeks to inspire researchers, entrepreneurs, and others competitive spirit in an effort to find specific solutions to the major challenges facing development and commercialization of hydrogen fuel. The H-Prize will help expand the possibilities of hydrogen research, promoting people not normally involved in federal research and development to explore one of the greatest challenges facing us today.

This prize will help us take advantage of America's great resource – our ingenuity and creativity – to tackle the problems before us. We have some of the best and brightest minds in the world in the United States, as well as an economy that supports and encourages entrepreneurship, and the H-prize will this focus inventiveness to address the greatest challenge that faces our country.

Hydrogen holds enormous potential as the base of our future economy - a potential we cannot and must not ignore.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the remainder of my time.